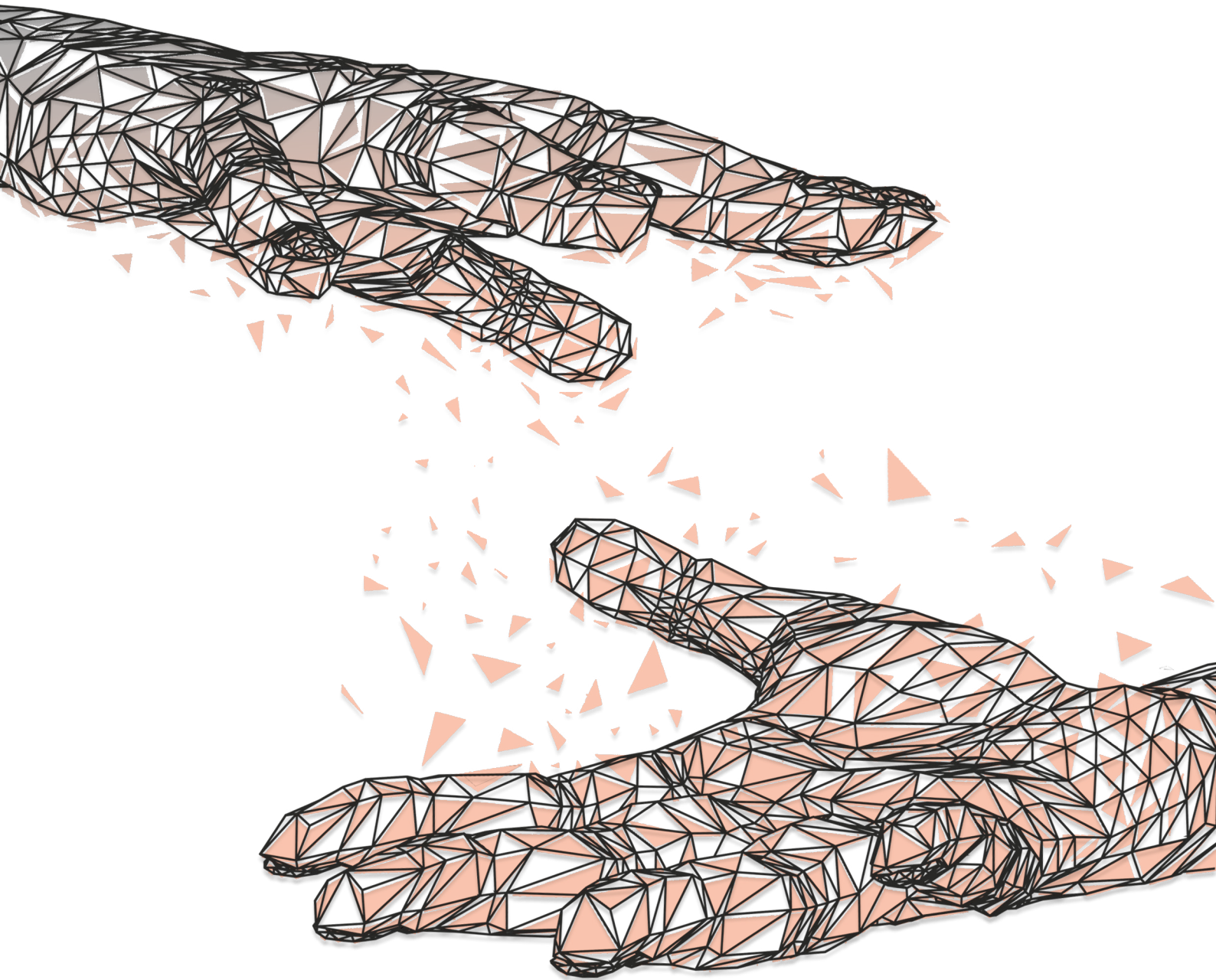


# COUNSELLING PRACTITIONER BEGINNER TO ADVANCED



CORE VALUES AND **ETHICAL**  
PRACTICE OF **COUNSELLING**

# CORE VALUES AND ETHICAL PRACTICE OF COUNSELLING

*The Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions (2016) is published by the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BCAP). A link to the complete document is provided at the end [1].*

**The word 'Ethics' comes from the Greek word Ethos which means character and is concerned with exploring the concepts of right and wrong. At the time of writing this article, counselling is not regulated by the UK government; no single ethical body oversees counselling or psychotherapy within the UK. This may be different in other countries.**

By its nature counselling can deal with sensitive information that the client is sharing with the practitioner. The client needs to be able to trust the practitioner to do this. Without this trust then the work of counselling cannot happen. The aim of the ethical framework is to create a basis of confidence in the client-therapist relationship through a series of commitments and establishing the ethics of the relationship.

## VALUES - PRINCIPLES - PERSONAL MORAL QUALITIES

If not the most essential element of counselling practice, 'respect for the client' is very high on the priority list. Geldard and Geldard (2005) explain that regardless of who the client is, and irrespective of their behaviour, the client has come to the counsellor for guidance and should be treated as a person of worth and value.

The quest for self-awareness is a major component of reflective counselling practice. Counsellors need not only to be aware of their skills, knowledge and performance as professionals, but must also be mindful of the values that govern their practice or factors that may impede their ability to provide an effective and objective service.

"Values can be thought of as priorities, internal compasses or spring-boards for action-moral imperatives" (D. Oyserman) [2]

Defining the values that will direct our counselling practice is a right way of expressing ethical standards that underpin the purpose and goals of our actions. As counselling practitioners, our fundamental values might include a commitment to:

1. Creating a culture of unconditional positive regard
2. Protecting the safety of our clients
3. Ensuring the integrity of practitioner-client relationships
4. Enhancing the calibre of professional knowledge and its application
5. Alleviating symptoms of personal distress and suffering
6. Enhancing people's wellbeing and capabilities
7. Improving the quality of relationships between people
8. Increasing personal resilience and effectiveness
9. Appreciating the variety of human experience and culture

Values inform principles and are intrinsic to us as individuals and those of us who wish to go into counselling, need to ensure that we share the values of the counselling profession.





# CORE VALUES AND ETHICAL PRACTICE OF COUNSELLING

## 1. Which of the above values are most important to you and why?

It is highly likely that if you are motivated to help others, then you will already share these values. At their heart is the belief in enhancing people's wellbeing and capabilities, improving relationships, improving resilience and effectiveness, integrity, honesty, fairness and quality.

These values inform the principles that we then adopt. These are more precisely defined.

Being Trustworthy	Respecting the trust placed in the practitioner
Autonomy	The client, should be self-directing
Beneficence	A commitment to the client's wellbeing
Non-maleficence	A duty to avoiding harm to the client
Justice	Fair treatment of all clients
Self-respect	The practitioner's ongoing commitment to self-awareness and integrity

If the practitioner has to make an ethical decision, if she can support that decision with two of these principles without contradicting another, then she is making a well-founded decision. Of course, some decisions will prove very difficult and possibly controversial, in which case careful consideration and accountability are essential.

## 2. Which of the above principles stand out as being important to you and why?

The third pillar of the ethical framework is the personal moral qualities of the practitioner. These are grounded in the idea of 'virtues' from moral philosophy. These moral qualities are informed by the values that the individual holds, but can be worked on, considered, honed and aspired to.

These are:

Care	Attentiveness to someone's needs & wellbeing.
Diligence	The conscientious use of the skills and knowledge needed to achieve a good outcome for the client.
Courage	Acting despite personal fears and uncertainty.
Empathy	The ability to understand the experience of another from their perspective
Identity	The sense of self in relation to others, that enables responsibility & resilience.
Humility	Facing one's weaknesses and acknowledging strengths
Integrity	Commitment to a moral approach to relationships
Resilience	Working with a client's challenges without suffering a personal cost
Respect	Giving due regard to others and their understanding of themselves
Sincerity	A consistency between word and deed
Wisdom	Displaying sound judgement



# CORE VALUES AND ETHICAL PRACTICE OF COUNSELLING

The practitioner will always have to use personal, professional judgement, but an ethical framework gives a go-to place for more difficult or thorny issues. It also informs the work that the therapist will also be doing on themselves (and with mentors) to improve themselves and their capacity to guide others.

### 3. Which of the above character traits do you value the most and why?

When Jung talked about the relationship between therapist and client, he described it as a 'chemical reaction' [3] that could not help but impact the therapist as well as the client. It is worthwhile to acknowledge that a therapist cannot remain entirely unaffected or dispassionate when dealing with clients; indeed it may be counterproductive to do so. However, there is a line to be walked, an ethical line, that requires a well-developed sense of self on the part of the therapist.

Dealing with client's challenges will inevitably present its challenges for the practitioner, which is why it is important to understand the ethical foundations upon which the relationship is based. This way, the practitioner will be aware enough to know when difficult decisions need to be made and the responsible way in which that should happen.

By committing to the ethics of the profession, practitioners are making a commitment to themselves and their clients. It is a pledge to high principle and to courage, to serve others and leave the world a better place than they found it.

## REFERENCES:

1. Bond, T. et al. (2016). *The Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*. British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BCAP). Retrieved from: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/ethical-framework-for-the-counselling-professions/>
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3. Jung, Carl (1933). *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. 2nd ed. Routledge.

